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The Transition of a Black Family: the progression of race, migration, and elevation within a black family

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Appendix D - UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM
SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Stephani Lynn Johnson

College: Business Administration Department: Marketing

Faculty Mentor: Professor George White, Jr.

PROJECT TITLE: The Transition of a Black Family:

the progression of race, migration, and elevation within a black family

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

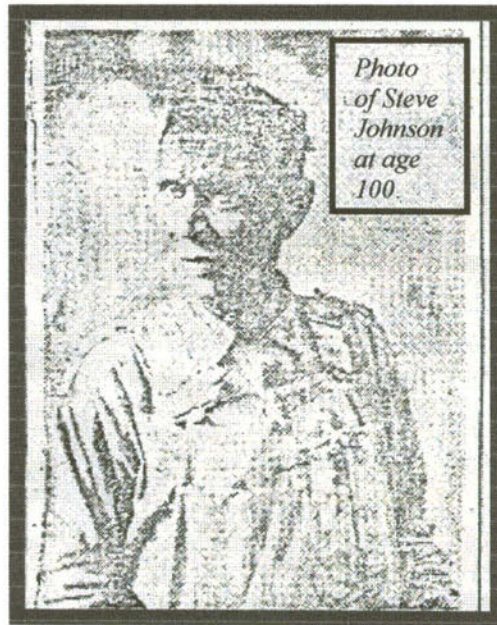
Signed:  Faculty Mentor

Date: May 7, 2000

Comments (Optional):

THIS PAPER IS A GREAT BEGINNING TO AN OPEN, UNWRITTEN CHAPTER OF HISTORY. I was delighted that Stephanie chose to do original research for her Honor's Thesis. Having read her work, I am excited about the possibilities for this line of research. We have discussed the import of her research, as well as ways she can supplement the existing oral history and documentation. In fact, I am inspired to begin my own genealogical research. Perhaps that is the highest tribute I can pay to her work because I believe that intellectual endeavors should be insightful and provocative!

***The Transition of a Black Family:
the progression of race, migration, and elevation
within a black family”***



Prepared for

Dr. Thomas Broadhead
Director
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Prepared by

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Project Advisor: George White, Jr.
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May 6, 2000

***“The Transition of a Black Family: the progression of race,
migration, and elevation within a black family”***

By Stephani Lynn Johnson

Abstract

The study conducted illustrates a glimpse of the progression of a black family, my family, within the confines of the United States. Most specifically, my research focuses on the life of and the oral history about my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson, an ex-slave and past resident of Harriman, Tennessee. My methods of research include oral informal interviews, newspapers, books, and the Internet.

Born on October 30, 1940 in the mountains of North Carolina, Steve Johnson's life evolves from one of an orphaned infant/toddler to fighting in the Civil War. From slavery to freedom, great, great grandfather migrated his way to a homestead on Walden Ridge, Harriman, Tennessee where some of his descendents remain to this day.

Judging from my research, several questions go unanswered about my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson such as:

- the life of his siblings and their migration
- the origin of the familial name Johnson
- the relevancy and assimilation of a Virginian plantation

These areas can be further addressed with additional research and time.

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Introduction

Genealogy has become an important aspect of many persons' lives. An ancestral account, whether oral or written, is a link from the present into the past. It confers a sense a belonging and a sense of relevance of one's life. I am interested in the genealogy of my family, the Johnson family. I am of the fourth generation removed from slavery in my family. My ancestral lineage move from myself, to my father William Johnson; to my grandfather Wayne Johnson; then to my great grandfather George Washington Johnson; and subsequently to great, great grandfather Steve Johnson (See Appendix I). Most specifically, I am fascinated by the oral history tracing back to my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to explicate the oral history's validity concerning my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson.

Scope

In this report, I will focus on the validity of the oral history that has been told and retold from generation to generation concerning my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson. I focus on three main areas of his life: his birth, the Civil War Era, and his later years of life.

Assumptions

My conclusions and recommendations are based on these three assumptions:

- The oral history is consistent to the best of my knowledge. Some information that will be revealed in this report is solely based on the oral narrative given.

- The oral history can be proven through historical documentation that not necessarily the Johnson family is in possession of currently.
- Other members of the Johnson family anticipate knowing the validity and relevancy of the oral history given about Steve Johnson and would like to further research and investigate this matter.

Methodology

Information for this report was acquired from print and online sources, along with periodic interviews with William B. Johnson, my father.

Online sources are a very reliable medium of communication. Many families utilize the Internet to research their genealogy.

I chose to interview my father because he is very knowledgeable about Steve Johnson and his life. During my father's youth, he became acquainted with George Washington Johnson, a son of Steve Johnson, who recited narrations about Steve Johnson to my father.

Limitations

My research has four limitations. Primarily, the time frame appropriated to research and to investigate my familial past is very confined. The study of one's heritage can take several years to compile and to validate.

Secondly, my involvement in other extracurricular activities, along with working, maintaining a full course load, interviewing for jobs, and preparing graduate school applications has restricted the quantity of research collected.

Thirdly, with my great, great grandfather being a slave for a great portion of his life, this has limitations also. Print sources such as birth certificates and marriage declarations have a high probability of being nonexistent due to the status & the devaluation of blacks during that time period.

Fourthly, my great, great grandfather has since died many years ago, along with the generations of my great grandfather George Washington Johnson & my grandfather Wayne Johnson. Thus, the current elders in my family are my father's generations who are three generations removed from the scope of this project. This being stated, the oral history narrated is somewhat limited and potentially could be reputed as an imprecise narrative of Steve Johnson's life.

Criteria

The most important criteria & justification that have been identified in this project is (1) to learn my heritage, (2) to validate the Johnson oral narrative, (3) to preserve my heritage, and (4) to further future research about the Johnson heritage by providing valid information that can be utilized and that can enrich the future investigations of the Johnson ancestry.

Oral History

William Bernadette Johnson is the primary source of the oral history recounted to me and illustrated in this report. William Johnson is a current resident of Midtown, Tennessee. He was born on St. Patrick's Day in 1949. Currently, he is an Engineering Technologist at Martin Marietta in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. His expertise on the Johnson familial oral history stems from his youth and recollections of what his grandfather, my great grandfather George Washington Johnson, communicated to him. The following *Oral History* is a compilation of the information revealed during the two interviews with William B. Johnson.

It was told that my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson was a 'remarkable man' (interview). He lived to be over 100 years old and had seen many things and many places during his longevity. The date of his birth was unknown. It had been said that my great, great grandfather Steve had migrated with his family from a Virginian plantation called Monticello. Monticello today is a historic site of Thomas Jefferson's home and estate. As writer of and co-signers of the Declaration of Independence, it is true that President

Jefferson did own slaves and has most recently been validated that he had fathered persons in bondage.

My great, great grandfather Steve Johnson along with his other family members were sold to a Tennessean gentleman by whose name at this point was unknown. It was surmised that this slaveowner settled in what is now termed Johnson City. *Could this slaveowner be the founder of such a city or a relative of the namesake?*

Time frames could not truly be established from the oral history rehashed other than Steve Johnson participated in the Civil War at the Battle of Chickamauga. Steve Johnson was a mulatto, a very fair-skinned black man. It is believed that my great, great grandfather might have passed in order to escape from captivity with a spy by the name of John Ross.

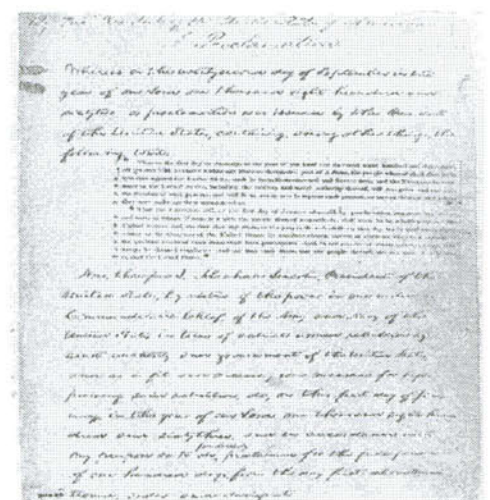
Eventually, my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson settled in Tennessee at what is now known as Harriman in a section of the town termed Bazeltown on Walden Ridge where currently many of his descendants reside to this day.

Validity and Relevancy of Oral History

The aforementioned *Oral History* provided a general and sound base to begin and investigate the familial origins. As discovered from the print sources that were gathered, the legitimacy of such a narrative was very accurate, with limited inconsistencies. The following will illustrate my findings.

Part Irish, Indian, and African heritage, my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson was born on October 30, 1840 in Asheville, North Carolina. It is assumed Steve was born a slave, which was not unusual circumstances for the majority of the black population during that time frame; the Emancipation Proclamation did not take affect until January 1, 1863. Steve Johnson's father died a week before his birth. His mother died some time after.

Through a North Carolinian court, Steve was sold to a man by the name of Samuel Lotspeich. Samuel was a Methodist preacher who resided in the city what is now called Newport, Tennessee.



Steve Johnson had three other siblings; however, they were bought by other persons and were never heard from again.

Steve worked for Samuel Lotspeich on his Newport farm. During the Civil War years (1861-1865), Samuel Lotspeich became a captain for the Confederacy. In December of 1861, Captain Samuel Lotspeich took Steve Johnson along with some of his other slaves to Charleston, South Carolina and then on to Columbus, Georgia to a Confederate camp. While there, Steve was held captive in a 'high-walled pen' with other slaves.

Steve befriended a Union spy by the name of John Rose who had entered the Confederate camp. John Rose promised Steve that he would assist him in escaping from the camp. Thus, one night, Steve took his bed sheets and made a rope from them. Steve tied a stick to



one end of the 'rope' in order to hook one end of the rope to the top of the wall. Once he accomplished this task, this enabled him to climb-out of the holding pen.

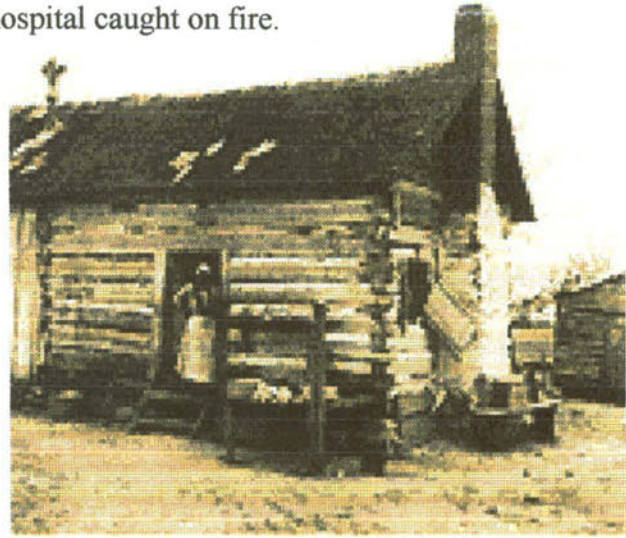
John Rose and Steve Johnson traveled to Atlanta, Georgia and then on to Chattanooga, Tennessee. There, great, great grandfather Steve enlisted with the Union army and fought in the Battle of Chickamauga. The Battle of

Chickamauga was one of the most important conflicts of the United States Civil War. The battle site was located near Chickamauga Creek, in northern Georgia, 12 miles from southern Chattanooga, Tennessee. The conflict began on September 19, 1863 and ended the following day.

At this engagement is where Steve Johnson was wounded. He received three shots, one nearly fatal. One bullet entered one of his legs, another became lodged in his shoulder, and the near fatal bullet struck his skull. Great, great grandfather Steve and other casualties of war were taken to Atlanta as to obtain treatment at a hospital there.

During his treatment there, the Atlanta hospital caught on fire. If it were not for Steve being adjacent to the doorway of the hospital, he, along with 90 other injured soldiers, would not have survived the said 'flaming building.'

Approximately 11 years later, on March 1, 1874, Steve Johnson began work for the C&S Railroad with Colonel J.C. Johnson and Colonel Venable. Steve assisted in the surveying of East Tennessee. Of that same



year, on October 25 at the age of 34, he married a 21-year-old young lady named Mary. He settled in a small cabin on Walden Ridge, part of what is now called Harriman, Tennessee. Much about great, great grandfather's life thereafter is unknown. Around 1925, at the old age of 85, Steve Johnson was bitten by nine rattlesnakes and still survived to tell the story.

If not Steve Johnson was a remarkable man, his life most definitely was. He is quoted as saying, "Thar's a power up thar what's kept me here and I hope when He takes me He'll know I've tried to live by good conduct."

The End

Or

Is it?

Conclusions & Recommendations

The oral history recounted has very high accuracy, however, there are still some questions and gaps that are unanswered. First, whatever happened to Steve Johnson's siblings goes unresolved. Discovering what happened to these relatives can provide another link to the Johnson familial history.

Secondly, more investigations on who Samuel Lotspeich was could further the awareness of the Johnson family heritage. As gathered from further research, there were two Samuel Lotspeich who lived during that era and around geographic area. The first Samuel Lotspeich was born on March 5, 1812. He was married to a woman by the name of Luiza. However, he died in Tennessee at the age of 35. This puts Samuel Lotspeich #1 as deceased by the time the Civil War took place. This eliminates any slavemaster-to-slave association with my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson.

The second Samuel Lotspeich from my findings was born on July 9, 1796 in Greene County, Tennessee. He was married three times. His first marriage took place on September 11, 1817 in Greene County, Tennessee to a lady by the name of Polly Bitner. The second time he was married to Lena Montgomery sometime before 1851. Then, finally, he was married about four years later to a woman named Larceny Evans. He died April 23, 1874. His burial site is unknown.

The second Samuel Lotspeich fits the time frame and geography of the Steve Johnson's chronology perfectly. However, further research needs to be formulated in order to justify this is the actual slavemaster of Steve Johnson. Such investigations could potentially lead to additional information about the life Steve Johnson led.

Thirdly, not a considerable amount of information is known about John Rose, the Union spy. More knowledge and information about him, again, could lead to more accounts about my great, great grandfather Steve Johnson and his life experiences.

Fourthly, there are significant gaps throughout Steve Johnson's life that go unexplained such as the time periods between 1861-1925. Again, additional information or data found on the aforementioned issues could heighten the knowledge of the Johnson family tree.

Further, the tales of migrating from a Virginian plantation, namely Monticello, could have validity, however, no relevancy was uncovered for the contents of this report. That is not to state that the tale of this Virginian estate has no validity, nevertheless, additional data will need to be compiled to better address the relevancy and authenticity of this tale within the Johnson familial legacy.

Finally, the issue of 'passing' is an aspect of life during years past that could most definitely influence one's social status and acceptance among society in general. 'Passing' is a perception that there are inferior and superior races; this belief led to the domination of one race over another, in this case, whites over blacks. Steve Johnson's ethnicity encompassed Irish, Indian, and African beginnings. His fair complexion was evidence of his Caucasian origin, however, his remaining physical attributes and features were those of a darker-skinned heritage. Still, blacks of the lighter-skinned pigmentation could position themselves with the perceived superior race, their liberated Caucasian brethren.

By being mulattos or being able to 'pass' as whites, blacks were readily more accepted by the perceived superior race than their darker-skinned sisters and brothers. Social acceptance by the white race led to various privileges bestowed to lighter-skinned blacks or for those blacks that both 'looked,' 'acted,' and 'sounded' white.

Thus, the 'passing' issue causes me to wonder if ever great, great grandfather Steve ever chose to straddle the racial divide whenever it was convenient. Such a question might always go unanswered.

In summary, this report is just the beginning of a potential lifelong project. Researching and writing this project has given me a greater appreciation of my heritage and has further encouraged me to learn as much as I possibly can about my family tree.

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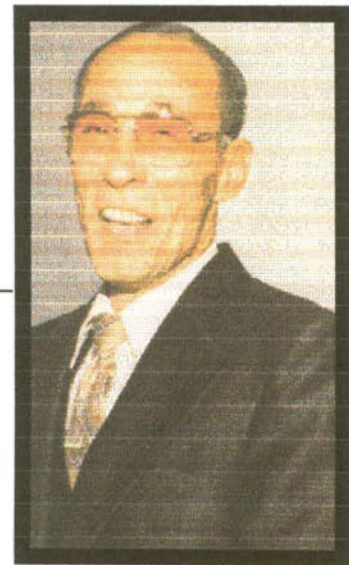
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Appendix I

Steve Johnson



**George
Washington
Johnson**



Wayne Johnson



William Bernadette Johnson